

**EVALUATION OF THE MICHIGAN FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY'S (FIA)  
FOSTER CARE STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING (SDM) CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM  
Summary**

**Foster Care Structured Decision Making (SDM) Background**

- SDM pilot agencies employed new case management procedures: an objective family strengths and needs assessment to develop case plans and focus service interventions; a structured reunification assessment to evaluate case plan progress, and clear benchmarks for altering the permanency planning goal.
- FIA implemented foster care SDM in January 1998 in three different pilot settings:
  1. Nine outstate counties: Hillsdale, Jackson, Macomb, Menominee, Midland, Missaukee, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Wexford;
  2. Two Wayne County purchase of service (POS) agencies;
  3. Wayne County direct service.
- **Objective of the SDM Pilot:** to expedite permanency for children entering foster care who have a return home goal. The pilot objectives are similar to those adopted by the federal Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA).

**Evaluation Outcome Measure**

- The percentage of children who achieve permanency 15 months after their entry into foster care, i.e., the permanency rate (similar to ASFA performance measures).

**Evaluation Methods**

- Agencies with characteristics similar to the SDM pilots were selected as comparison sites. The pilot and comparison agencies:
  1. had similar demographic and administrative characteristics;
  2. served similar client populations; and
  3. achieved permanency for a similar percentage of the children entering foster care.
- The impact of SDM pilot procedures was evaluated by comparing the rates at which children entering foster care in pilot and comparison sites achieved permanency after SDM implementation (i.e., cases entering foster care between April 1998 and September 1999).

**SDM Evaluation Findings**

- The implementation of foster care SDM appears to have expedited permanency for children entering foster care in both county agencies and private POS agencies.
- Pilot SDM sites in outstate counties and Wayne POS agencies had significantly higher permanency rates for new foster care cases in the post-implementation period than did equivalent comparison agencies.
- Although an equivalent comparison group could not be identified for Wayne County direct services, the agency's permanency performance improved significantly after SDM implementation. The rate of improvement was greater than that observed in similar agencies.
- The SDM pilot case management procedures demonstrated positive performance in each of FIA's major foster care service delivery systems - outstate counties, Wayne County, and POS agencies.

**EVALUATION OF THE MICHIGAN FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY'S (FIA)  
FOSTER CARE STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING (SDM)  
CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM  
Executive Summary**

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- FIA implemented foster care SDM in January 1998 in three different pilot settings:
  1. Nine outstate counties: Hillsdale, Jackson, Macomb, Menominee, Midland, Missaukee, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Wexford;
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- **Objective of the SDM Pilot:** to expedite permanency for children entering foster care who have a return home goal. The pilot objectives are similar to those adopted by the federal Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA).

**Evaluation Outcome Measure**

- The percentage of children who achieve permanency 15 months after their entry into foster care, i.e., the permanency rate (similar to ASFA performance measures).
- Permanency may be achieved by the child's: 1) TPR/adoption, 2) return home, 3) permanent placement with a family member/guardian, or 4) other permanent arrangements (placement agreement or independent living).

**Evaluation Methods**

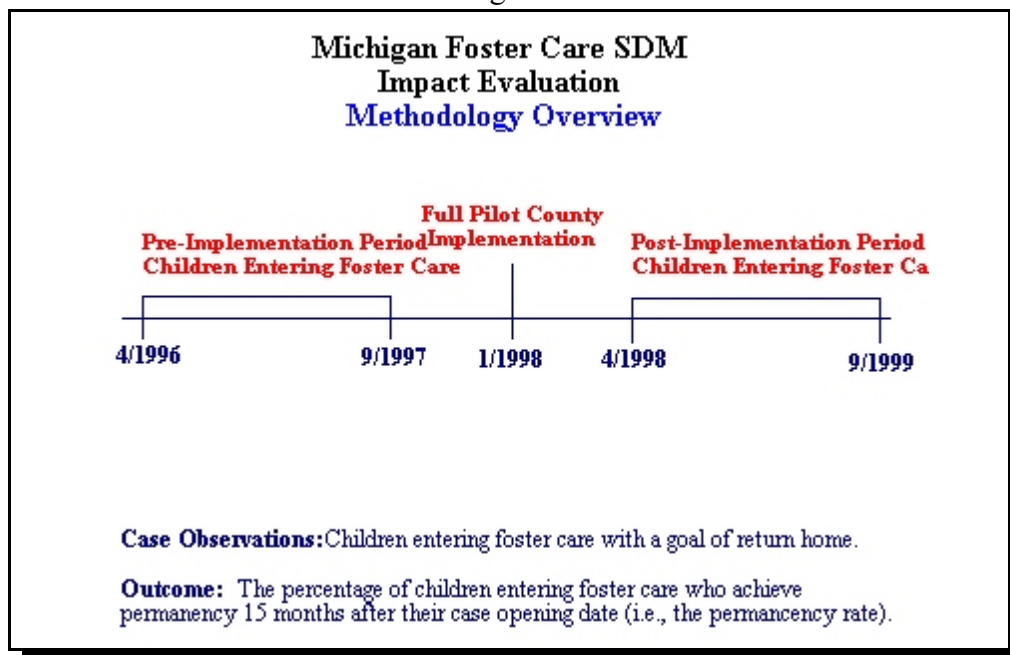
- Agencies with characteristics similar to the SDM pilots were selected as comparison sites. In an 18-month operating period prior to SDM implementation (April 1996 through September 1997), pilot and comparison agencies:
  1. had similar demographic and administrative characteristics;
  2. served similar client populations; and
  3. achieved permanency for a similar percentage of the children entering foster care.
- The impact of SDM pilot procedures was evaluated by comparing the rates at which children entering foster care in pilot and comparison sites achieved permanency after SDM implementation (i.e., cases entering foster care between April 1998 and September 1999).
- The comparison sites employed existing FIA case management procedures.

## Evaluation Overview

<u>Study Design:</u>	Quasi-experimental, post-implementation comparison. SDM pilot site performance is compared to non-pilot agencies with equivalent pre-implementation demographic, client and permanency performance characteristics.
<u>Cases:</u>	All children entering foster care with a goal of return home during the pre- or post-SDM implementation operating periods in pilot/comparison sites.
<u>Observation Periods:</u>	Pre-implementation equivalence (18 months: April 1996 - September 1997) Post-implementation evaluation (18 months: April 1998 - September 1999)
<u>Outcome Measure:</u>	Percentage of children entering foster care achieving permanency 15 months after their case opening date (i.e., the permanency rate). Type of permanency is also examined.
<u>Data Source:</u>	Michigan Child Information System (CIS).

- **Pre- and post-implementation** observation periods are shown below in Figure 1.

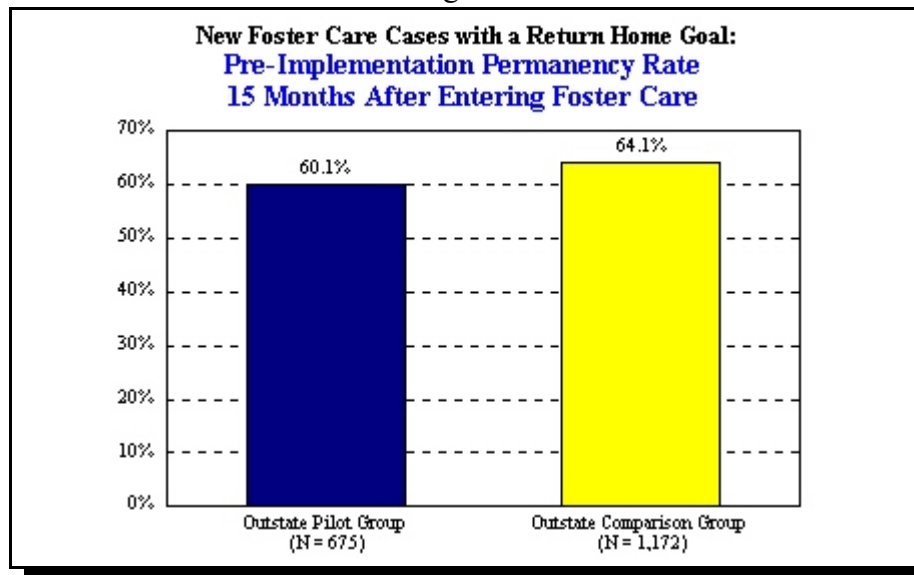
Figure 1



## Outstate Pilot/Comparison Counties Pre-Implementation Performance

- In the pre-implementation period, the nine pilot and nine comparison counties had similar demographics and children entering new foster care had similar characteristics.
- New cases entering foster care in the pilot and comparison counties also achieved permanency at a similar rate during the pre-implementation period (see Figure 2 below). Although comparison counties have a higher permanency rate, the difference is not significant.

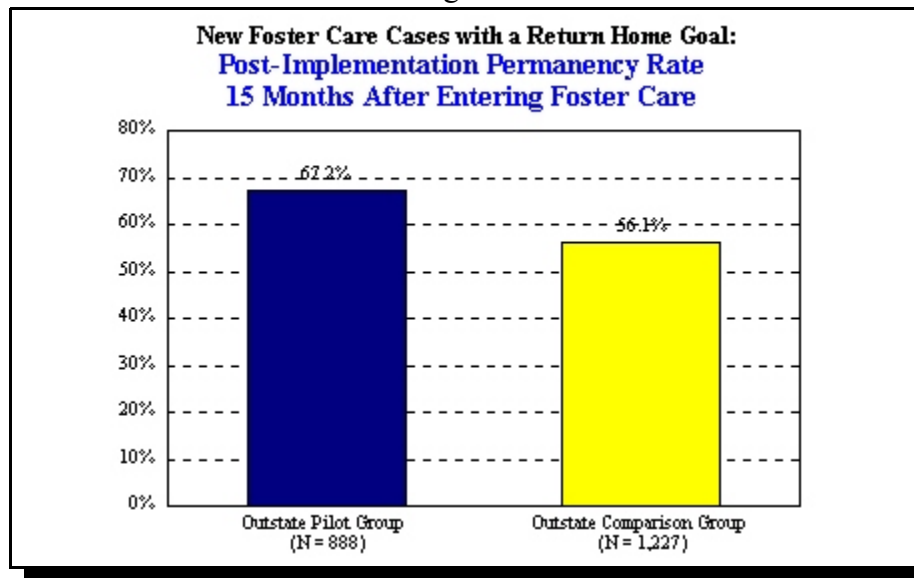
Figure 2



## Outstate Pilot County SDM Evaluation Findings

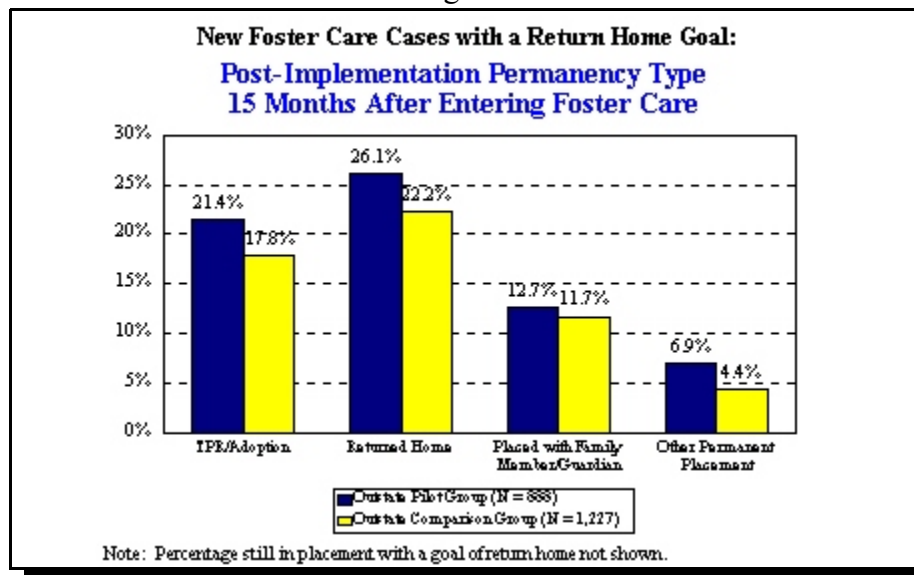
- After SDM implementation, the permanency rate for new foster care cases in pilot counties was significantly higher than in comparison sites (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3



- Pilot county performance was superior to that of comparison agencies in achieving each of the four types of permanency, i.e., TPR/adoption, return home, placed with family, etc. (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4

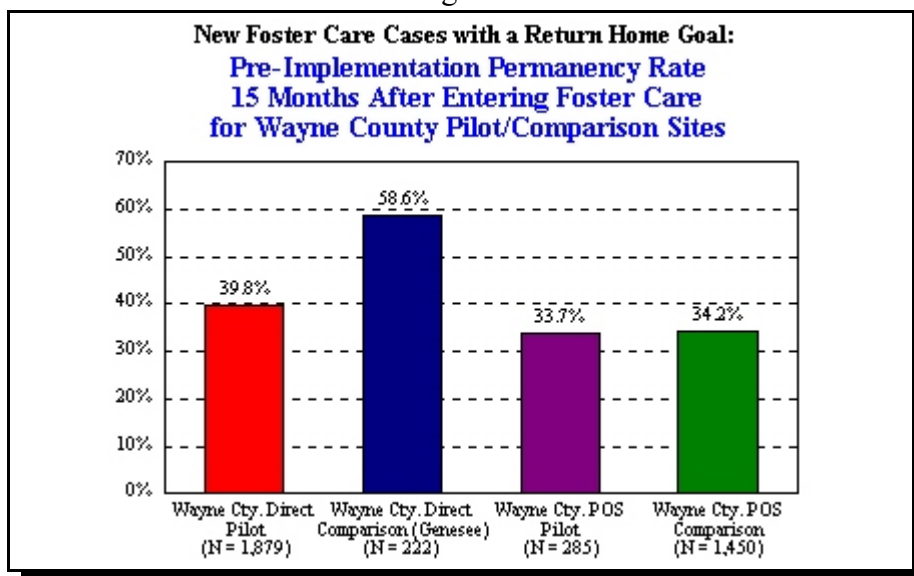


- The permanency rate was also higher in pilot counties for subgroups of foster care cases defined by the child's ethnicity, initial placement setting, and case management responsibilities (POS agency vs. direct service; not shown).
- Regression analysis showed that of post-implementation cases, children served by pilot counties were significantly more likely to have attained permanency within 15 months of entering care after controlling for case management responsibilities, child ethnicity, the child's age at case opening and initial placement setting (results not shown).

## Wayne Pilot/Comparison Purchase of Service (POS) Agencies Pre-Implementation Performance

- The Wayne County pilot and comparison POS agencies have similar administrative characteristics and serve clients from the same urban area.
- In the pre-implementation period, the pilot and comparison POS sites achieved permanency for children entering foster care at a nearly identical rate (33.7% versus 34.2%, see two right hand bars in Figure 5 below).

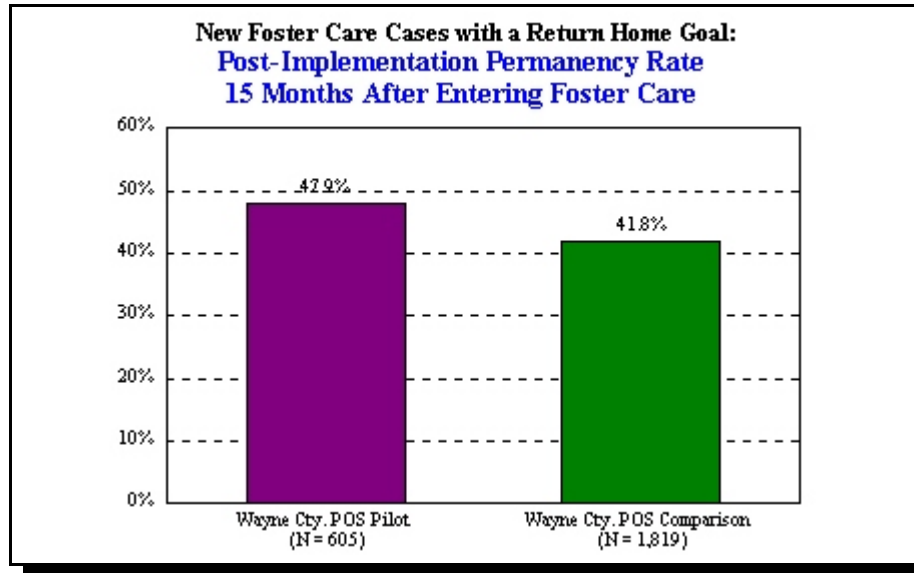
Figure 5



## Wayne POS Pilot SDM Evaluation Findings

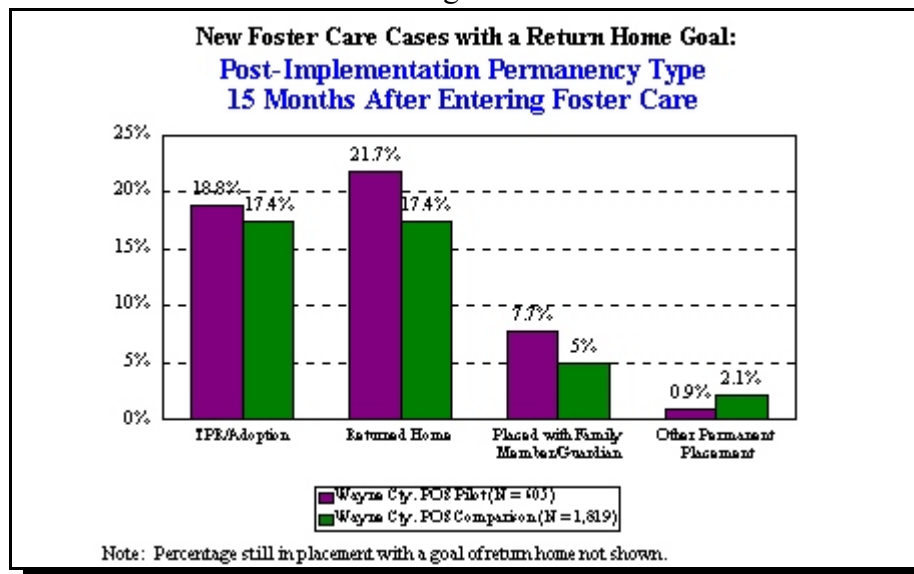
- After SDM implementation, the rate at which children entering foster care achieved permanency was significantly higher in the POS pilot sites (see Figure 6).

Figure 6



- Pilot POS agencies achieved permanency at a higher rate in three of the four possible ways: TPR/adoption, returning the child home, and placement with other family members (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

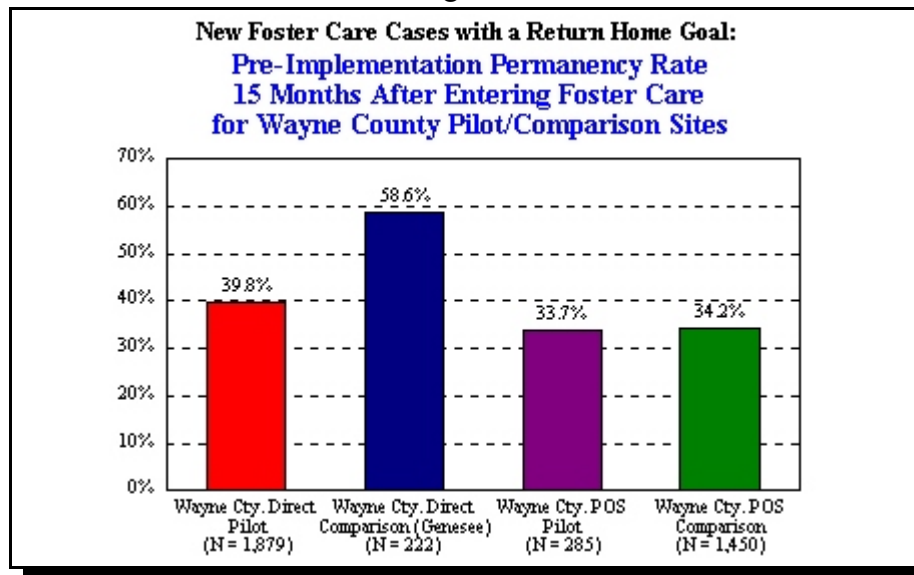


- Pilot agency permanency rates were also higher than comparison sites for subgroups of children defined by ethnicity, initial placement, and age (not shown).
- Regression analysis showed that among post-implementation Wayne County POS cases, children served by pilot agencies were significantly more likely to have a permanent placement within the first 15 months after controlling for child ethnicity, age at case opening, and initial placement (results not shown).

### Wayne County Direct Service Pilot/Comparison Pre-Implementation Performance

- There are no counties in Michigan comparable to Wayne County in terms of size, population, density, client characteristics, or administrative complexity. This makes it difficult to identify a reasonably equivalent comparison agency.
- The most likely comparison site (Genesee) is significantly smaller, more rural, and achieved permanency for children entering foster care at a significantly higher rate in the pre-implementation period (see the two left hand bars of Figure 8 below).
- Although Wayne direct shares many characteristics with Wayne POS agencies (i.e., urban setting, client characteristics), it had a better record of achieving permanency for new foster care cases prior to SDM implementation than either Wayne POS pilot or comparison POS agencies (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

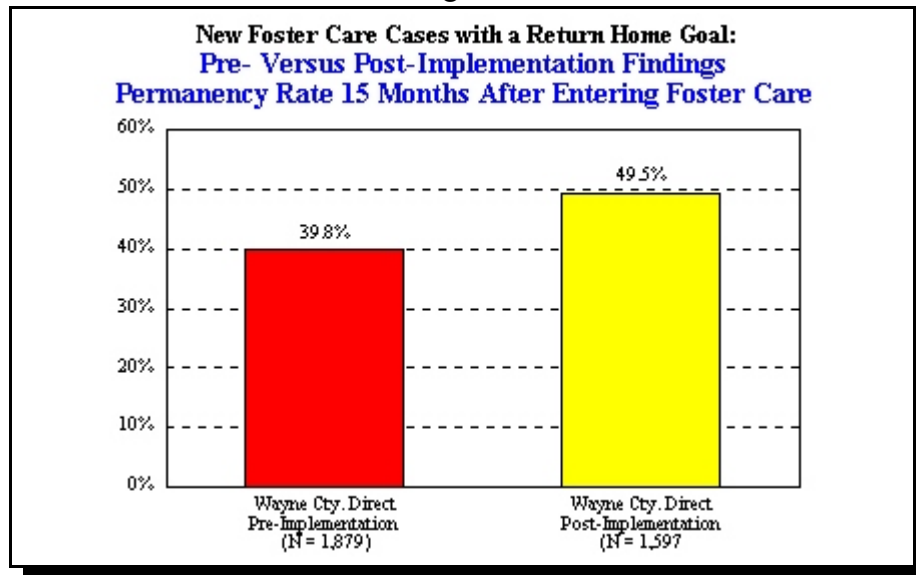


- Since a reasonably equivalent comparison agency cannot be identified, Wayne direct is evaluated by comparing the agency's pre-implementation permanency performance for cases entering foster care to its post-implementation performance. The evaluation simply asks if Wayne improved the rate at which permanency was achieved for cases entering care after SDM implementation.

## Wayne County Direct Pilot SDM Evaluation Findings

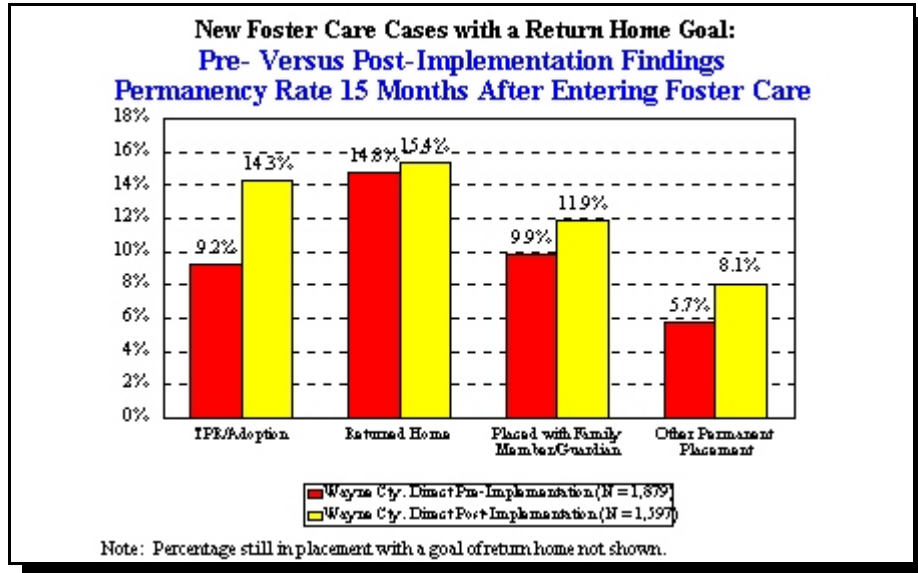
- Children entering foster care at Wayne direct had a significantly higher permanency rate after SDM implementation than in the pre-implementation period (see Figure 9 below, pre-implementation is the left bar, post-implementation is the right).
- Wayne direct increased its permanency rate from pre- to post-implementation more than Wayne comparison POS agencies (not shown).

Figure 9



- Compared to the pre-implementation period, Wayne direct had higher post-implementation rates for each type of permanency, i.e., TPR/adoption, return home, placed with family (see Figure 10).

Figure 10



- Post-implementation permanency rates also improved for subgroups defined by child's ethnicity, initial placement type, and age (not shown).

## Summary SDM Evaluation Findings

- The implementation of foster care SDM appears to have expedited permanency for children entering foster care in both county agencies and private POS agencies.
- Pilot SDM sites in outstate counties and Wayne POS agencies had significantly higher permanency rates for new foster care cases in the post-implementation period than equivalent comparison agencies.
- The findings indicate that SDM pilots performed better across each type of permanency (TPR/adoption, return home, family/guardian placement) and had higher permanency rates than comparison agencies for client subgroups defined by child ethnicity, initial placement type, or age.
- Although an equivalent comparison group could not be identified for Wayne County direct services, the agency's performance improved significantly after SDM implementation. The rate of improvement was greater than that observed in similar agencies.
- The SDM case management procedures demonstrate positive performance in each of FIA's major foster care service delivery systems - outstate counties, Wayne County, and POS agencies.